



TURF WAR



Las Vegas pushes to become first to ban ornamental grass

Sprinklers water grass near a street corner Friday, April 9, 2021, in the Summerlin neighborhood of northwest Las Vegas.

Associated Press
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Las Vegas pushes to become first to ban ornamental grass

From Front

By **SAM METZ/KEN RITTER**
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A desert city built on a reputation for excess and indulgence wants to become a model for restraint and conservation with a first-in-the-nation policy banning grass that nobody walks on.

Las Vegas-area water officials have spent two decades trying to get people to replace thirsty greenery with desert plants, and now they're asking the Nevada Legislature to outlaw roughly 40% of the turf that's left.

The Southern Nevada Water Authority estimates there are almost 8 square miles (21 square kilometers) of "nonfunctional turf" in the metro area — grass that no one ever walks on or otherwise uses in street medians, housing developments and office parks.

They say this ornamental grass requires four times as much water as drought-tolerant landscaping like cactus and other succulents. By ripping it out, they estimate the region can reduce an-



In this Aug. 13, 2020 file photo a bathtub ring of light minerals delineates the high water mark on Lake Mead at the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, near Boulder City, Nev.

Associated Press

nual water consumption by roughly 15% and save about 14 gallons (53 liters) per person per day.

Las Vegas might be known for splashy displays like the Bellagio fountains on the neon-lit Strip, but officials say residents of bedroom communities and sprawling suburbs embrace conservation measures, including

aggressive monitoring of sprinklers and leaky irrigation systems.

"The public perception outside of Las Vegas is certainly much different — and has been for a long time — than the water conservation ethic within the community," said Colby Pellegrino, Southern Nevada Water Authority water re-

sources director.

California imposed a temporary ban on watering ornamental grass during last decade's drought, but no state or major city has tried to phase out certain categories of grass permanently.

"The scale of this is pretty unprecedented in terms of a full ban on this nonfunctional turf," said John Berggren, a water policy analyst at Western Resource Advocates.

The proposal is part of a turf war waged since at least 2003, when the water authority banned developers from planting green front yards in new subdivisions. It also offers owners of older properties the region's most generous rebate policies to tear out sod — up to \$3 per square foot.

Those efforts are slowing. The agency says the number of acres converted under its rebate program fell last year to six times less than what it was in 2008. Meanwhile, water consumption in southern Nevada has increased 9% since 2019.

Last year was among the driest in the region's history, when Las Vegas went a record 240 days without measurable rainfall. And the future flow of the Colorado River, which accounts for 90% of southern Nevada's water, is in question.

The waterway supplies Arizona, California, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Wyoming and Mexico. As drought and climate change decrease what the river provides, the amount allocated to Arizona, California and Nevada is projected to be cut further. Justin Jones, a Clark County commissioner who serves on the water authority's board, doesn't think ripping out ornamental turf will upend people's lives.

"To be clear, we are not coming after your average homeowner's backyard," he said. But grass in the middle of a parkway, where no one walks: "That's dumb."

"The only people that ever set foot on grass that's in the middle of a roadway system are people cutting the grass," Jones said.

The agency has different regulations for yards and public parks. Based on satellite imaging, it believes banning ornamental grass will primarily affect common areas maintained by homeowner associations and commercial property owners. Jones said the proposal has drawn resistance in some master-planned communities, but water officials say years of drought-awareness campaigns and policies like the rebates have cultivated a cultural change. Southern Nevada Homebuilders' Association lobbyist Matt Walker said consumer preferences have reached the point that potential homebuyers from wetter regions aren't turned off from neighborhoods that have parks but no ornamental grass.

Conservation frees water, reduces per capita consumption and strengthens builders' arguments that the desert can accommodate more growth, Walker said. "And the benefits are the ability to keep doing what we do, which is building homes."

"We've really gotten a comfort level that buyers are very much willing to go along with responsible development practices when it comes to water use," he added. □



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Biden sees 'win' for U.S. in electric vehicle battery deal

By **MATTHEW DALY and TOM KRISHER**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two big South Korean electric vehicle battery makers said Sunday they have settled a long-running trade dispute that will allow one company to move ahead with plans to manufacture batteries in Georgia. President Joe Biden called it "a win for American workers and the American auto industry." The agreement between LG Energy Solution and SK Innovation ended the need for Biden to intervene in a case closely watched for its implications on Biden's clean-energy agenda, which includes a sharp increase in the number of electric vehicles as part of his plan to address climate change. Biden had until Sunday night to make a decision, following a ruling in February by a trade commission.

The companies said in a joint statement that SK will provide LG Energy with a total of \$1.8 billion and an undisclosed royalty. They agreed to withdraw all pending trade disputes in the United States and South Korea and not assert new claims for 10 years.

"We have decided to settle and to compete in an amicable way, all for the future of the U.S. and South Korean electric vehicle battery industries," said Jun Kim, CEO and president of SK, and Jong Hyun Kim, CEO and president of LG Energy. The companies pledged to work together to strengthen the EV battery supply chain in the U.S. and sup-

port the Biden administration's efforts to advance clean energy policies, including electric vehicles.

The commission said SK could supply batteries to Ford Motor Co. for four years and to Volkswagen

of the two companies as suppliers to the U.S. auto industry. The agreement puts the U.S. "in a stronger

groundwork for the jobs of tomorrow.

Today's settlement is a positive step in that direction," Biden said.

Gov. Brian Kemp, R-Ga., called the settlement "fantastic news for northeast Georgia and our state's growing electric vehicle industry."

Ford, in a statement, said the deal "allows us to focus on delivering a range of Ford world-class battery electric vehicles for our retail and fleet customers, while also supporting American workers, the economy and our shared goal of protecting the planet."

Sam Abuelsamid, principal analyst for Guidehouse Insights, said a settlement was always the most likely outcome. Demand for electric vehicles is projected to rise dramatically by 2035, and other companies will start making them in the U.S. to meet that demand, he said.

Switching the U.S. fleet of roughly 279 million largely gas-powered cars and trucks to electric vehicles is a focus of Biden's infrastructure plan, with \$174 billion allocated for EV incentives, a half-million charging stations and development of a domestic supply chain. Experts say it's possible the U.S. will run short of electric vehicle batteries if it doesn't set up its own network of parts suppliers.

"We don't have nearly enough (existing) battery production capacity to meet the kind of volumes that companies are talking about producing," Abuelsamid said. □



President Joe Biden waves as he departs after attending Mass at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, Saturday, April 10, 2021.

Associated Press

The U.S. International Trade Commission had decided in February that SK stole 22 trade secrets from LG Energy, and that SK should be barred from importing, making or selling batteries in the United States for 10 years.

The decision could have left Ford and Volkswagen scrambling for batteries as they both roll out additional electric vehicle models, a priority for the companies and for the Biden administration.

SK has contracts to make batteries for an electric Ford F-150 pickup truck and an electric Volkswagen SUV.

AG for two years. The decision had jeopardized a \$2.6 billion battery factory that SK is building in Commerce, Georgia.

Democratic Sen. Jon Ossoff of Georgia, who at Biden's request had jump-started negotiations between two companies, said the settlement "has saved the battery plant in Commerce, Georgia, ensuring thousands of jobs, billions in future investment, and that Georgia will be a leader in electric vehicle battery production for years to come." U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai said the deal "builds confidence" in the reliability and responsibility

position to drive innovation and ... clean energy technology while also respecting the rights of technology innovators at the heart of trade and manufacturing policy," Tai said.

Biden said in a statement that building electric vehicles and the batteries needed for them is an important part of his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan.

"We need a strong, diversified and resilient U.S.-based electric vehicle battery supply chain, so we can supply the growing global demand for these vehicles and components — creating good-paying jobs here at home, and laying the

Cities win immigration policing dispute with U.S. government

BOSTON (AP) — The U.S. Department of Justice has dropped its challenge to a court decision that said the federal government could not force two Rhode Island cities to turn local police into federal immigration agents.

Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza and Central Falls Mayor Maria Rivera said in a news release that the Justice Department dropped the appeal from the Republican administration of former President Donald Trump, The Providence Journal reported Friday. The department is now led by Attorney General Merrick Garland, an appointee of Democratic President Joe Biden.

The two cities sued in August 2018 after the federal government required recipients of the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance

Grant to cooperate with authorities in the enforcement of federal immigration law.

Both cities are self-described "sanctuary cities" and do not direct their police forces to carry out federal immigration policy.

A U.S. District Court and the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals both sided with the cities.

"I am thrilled that the federal courts served as a critical firewall against these unconstitutional directives," Elorza said in a statement. "We stood proudly in court and stated that Providence is a welcoming city, that we will stand by our values, and we will fight the federal government's illegal and unconstitutional overreaching." □

Women fighting fires in Florida: Colleagues' support crucial

By ANILA YOGANATHAN
Associated Press

Krystyna Krakowski became a firefighter in Florida at a time when there were very few women to work beside or guide her in the service. Twenty years later, she is not only thriving but also recruiting more females into the profession. Krakowski is one of five women at Palm Beach Gardens Fire Rescue who made department history last year by working an entire shift with no male colleagues — a feat that went viral on social media. She and her team members say they have been able to succeed thanks to both the support of the men they work with and by pushing through every challenge that comes their way. The chain saw-and-ax-wielding women note they are held to the same standards as the men, physically and otherwise, and that the public should be aware that men and women of the department work together to help people.

"I've worked super hard to be strong from Day One," said firefighter Julie Dudley. "I still remember being in an academy and the instructor looking at me going, 'If you want to do girly push ups you can,' and I was like, 'Excuse me. No, I'm good. I got this.'"

The firefighters' success is notable in a profession that is so heavily male-dominated and that has seen numerous lawsuits from women alleging discrimination



In this Sept. 19, 2020, photo provided by Palm Beach Gardens Fire and Rescue, firefighters Lt. Krystyna Krakowski, Lt. Kelsey Krzywada, fire medic Julie Dudley, lieutenant and acting Capt. Monica Marzullo and driver engineer Sandi Ladewskipose at their station in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

and sexual harassment in fire departments across the country.

"Even our battalion chiefs sent us a message: 'Good luck, ladies, all eyes are on you today. Show 'em what you got,'" Krakowski said. "It was exciting to say that every position was filled by a female. ... We played every role. We're capable. We've made it."

It wasn't always easy, however. Even some of the women on the history-making team had to overcome prior obstacles. In the fire department where she previously worked, Krakowski says she was the target of a hazing. She said fellow firefighters awoke her with an airhorn, held her down and zip-tied her hands and legs. When the incident came

up on a radio show, Krakowski said she felt compelled to call in because comments from the public were so awful.

"It was heart-wrenching to hear another woman say, 'She doesn't belong in a firehouse. It must be a girl who needs attention,'" Krakowski said. "I'm a hard-working single mom. I've been that way almost my

entire life; nothing has ever been given."

Kelsey Krzywada said at her first fire school, instructors were unwilling to help her when she struggled with the training because of her small size. At the second school she tried, however, "They were encouraging, regardless of your size, your gender," Krzywada said. "They loved their career, and they wanted all of us to love it too."

Krzywada said her choice of professions also negatively affected a relationship. "His girl works with chain saws and fire, and he feels a little less of a man," she remarked of a former partner. When their all-woman shift went viral, most of the feedback on social media was positive, but there were detractors as well.

"We'd have people going, 'How are you going to carry my 300-pound husband out of a building over your shoulder when it's on fire?'" Julie Dudley said. "Well, we're not. And I can tell you that no man in our department is going to do it either." The firefighters acknowledge that the physical aspects of the job can be challenging, but they said they have learned how to play to their strengths as women rather than relying on brute force. As smaller women, Krzywada and Krakowski have found alternate but effective ways to do their job, whether it's pulling a hose line or throwing ladders, they said. □

Associated Press

Reports: Man kills self after standoff at Honolulu hotel



Members of the Honolulu Police Specialized Services Division respond to a barricade situation with an armed man at the Kahala Hotel in Honolulu on Saturday, April 10, 2021.

Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A standoff between Honolulu police and an armed man who fired shots through the door of his room at a luxury resort ended when the man was found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, local media reported Sunday.

A SWAT team entered the fourth-floor room at The Kahala Hotel & Resort about 3:30 a.m. Sunday and found the man dead, local television stations and a newspaper reported, citing

unnamed police officials. All reported police didn't release further information, including the man's name. Messages sent to spokespersons for the Honolulu Police Department and the Honolulu mayor's office seeking confirmation and further details were not immediately returned Sunday to The Associated Press. Shots were fired at around 6 p.m., according to police. Hotel security staff went up to the room where the man was located and knocked

on the door. He then fired through the door multiple times, police said.

No one outside the door was hurt, Honolulu police Capt. Brian Lynch told news outlets. The luxury resort said in a statement that hotel security and law enforcement evacuated the area around the room.

Authorities have not released any details about the events leading up to the stand-off. Police believe the man is in the military. □

Reports: Myanmar forces kill 82 in single day in city

YANGON (AP) — At least 82 people were killed in one day in a crackdown by Myanmar security forces on pro-democracy protesters, according to reports Saturday from independent local media and an organization that keeps track of casualties since the February coup.

Friday's death toll in Bago was the biggest one-day total for a single city since March 14, when just over 100 people were killed in Yangon, the country's biggest city. Bago is about 100 kilometers (60 miles) northeast of Yangon. The Associated Press is unable to independently verify the number of deaths.

The death toll of 82 was a preliminary one compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which issues daily counts of casualties and arrests from the crackdown in the aftermath of the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Their tallies are widely accepted as highly credible because cases are not added until they have been confirmed, with the details published on their website.

In its Saturday report, the group said that it expected the number of dead in Bago to rise as more cases were verified.

The online news site Myan-



A police vehicle is parked at a road in South Okkalapa township to block anti-coup protesters' gathering in Yangon, Myanmar, Friday, April 9, 2021.

mar Now also reported that 82 people had been killed, citing an unnamed source involved with charity rescue work. Myanmar Now and other local media said the bodies had been collected by the military and dumped on the grounds of a Buddhist pagoda.

At least 701 protesters and bystanders have been killed by security forces since the army's takeover, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

The attack on Bago was the third in the past week involving the massive use of force to try to crush the persistent opposition to the ruling jun-

ta. Attacks were launched Wednesday on hardcore opponents of military rule who had set up strongholds in the towns of Kalay and Taze in the country's north. In both places, at least 11 people -- possibly including some bystanders -- were reported killed. The security forces were accused of using heavy weapons in their attacks, including rocket-propelled grenades and mortars, though such allegations could not be independently confirmed by The Associated Press. Photos posted on social media from Bago appeared to show fragments of mortar shells.

Most protests in cities and town around the country are carried out by non-violent demonstrators who consider themselves part of a civil disobedience movement.

But as the police and military escalated the use of lethal force, a hardcore faction of protesters armed themselves with home-made weapons such as firebombs in the name of self-defense. In Kalay, activists dubbed themselves a "civil army" and some equipped themselves with rudimentary hunting rifles that are traditional in the remote area.

A report by Myanmar Now

said residents of Tamu, a town in the same region as Kalay, used hunting rifles Saturday to ambush a military convoy, and claimed to kill three soldiers.

The junta has taken other measures as well to discourage resistance. It recently published a wanted list of 140 people active in the arts and journalism charged with spreading information that undermines the stability of the country and the rule of law. The penalty for the offense is up to three years' imprisonment. Arrests of those on the list have been highly publicized in state media.

State television channel MRTV reported Friday night that a military court had sentenced to death 19 people -- 17 in absentia -- for allegedly killing an army officer in Yangon on March 27. The attack took place in an area of the city that is under martial law, and the court action appeared to be the first time the death sentence has been imposed under the junta's rule.

The U.N. special envoy for Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, arrived Friday in the Thai capital Bangkok on a regional mission to resolve the crisis in Myanmar. She intends to sound out several Southeast Asian governments for their ideas but has been denied permission to visit Myanmar. □

Associated Press

U.S.-Philippines officials discuss concerns over China's ships

By **ROBERT BURNS**

**AP National Security Writer
ABOARD A U.S. MILITARY
AIRCRAFT (AP)** — Defense

Secretary Lloyd Austin on Saturday discussed with his Philippine counterpart China's recent positioning of "militia vessels" near the Philippines in the South China Sea.

Austin spoke by phone with Philippine Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana while Austin was flying from Washington to Israel to begin an international trip.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Austin and

Lorenzana discussed the situation in the South China Sea and the recent massing of Chinese vessels at Whitsun Reef, which has drawn criticism from Manila.

China has said its vessels are there for fishing.

In their phone call, Austin proposed to Lorenzana several measures to deepen defense cooperation, including by "enhancing situational awareness of threats in the South China Sea," Kirby said. He did not elaborate.

Kirby said earlier this week that the aircraft carrier USS

Theodore Roosevelt and its strike group, as well as the amphibious ship USS Makin Island, are operating in the South China Sea.

The U.S. has no military forces based permanently in the Philippines but sometimes rotates forces to the country under the U.S.-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement.

The recent gathering of Chinese vessels near the Philippines is among moves the United States has criticized as efforts by Beijing to intimidate smaller nations in the region. □



This file photo released Nov. 5, 2019, by the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, shows centrifuge machines in the Natanz uranium enrichment facility in central Iran.

Associated Press

Iran calls Natanz atomic site blackout 'nuclear terrorism'

By JON GAMBRELL

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran on Sunday described a blackout at its underground Natanz atomic facility an act of "nuclear terrorism," raising regional tensions as world powers and Tehran continue to negotiate over its tattered nuclear deal.

While there was no immediate claim of responsibility, suspicion fell immediately on Israel, where its media nearly uniformly reported a devastating cyberattack orchestrated by the country caused the blackout. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu later Sunday night toasted his security chiefs, with the head of the Mossad, Yossi Cohen, at his side on the eve of his country's Independence Day.

"It is very difficult to explain what we have accomplished," Netanyahu said of Israel's history, saying the country had been transformed from a position of weakness into a "world power."

If Israel caused the blackout, it further heightens tensions between the two nations, already engaged in a shadow conflict across the wider Middle East. Netanyahu, who also met Sunday with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, has vowed to do everything in his power to stop the nuclear deal.

Details remained few about what happened early Sunday morning at the facility, which initially was described as a blackout caused by the electrical grid feeding its above-ground workshops and underground enrichment halls.

Ali Akbar Salehi, the American-educated head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, who once served as the country's for-



This file photo released Nov. 5, 2019, by the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, shows centrifuge machines in the Natanz uranium enrichment facility in central Iran.

Associated Press

eign minister, offered what appeared to be the harshest comments of his long career, which included the assassination of nuclear scientists a decade ago. Iran blames Israel for those killings as well.

He pledged to "seriously improve" his nation's nuclear technology while working to lift international sanctions.

Salehi's comments to state TV did not explain what happened at the facility, but his words suggested a serious disruption.

"While condemning this desperate move, the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasizes the need for a confrontation by the international bodies and the (International Atomic Energy Agency) against this nuclear terrorism," Salehi said. The IAEA, the United Nations' body that monitors Tehran's atomic program, earlier said it was aware of media reports about the incident at Natanz and had spoken with Iranian officials

about it. The agency did not elaborate.

However, Natanz has been targeted by sabotage in the past. The Stuxnet computer virus, discovered in 2010 and widely believed to be a joint U.S.-Israeli creation, once disrupted and destroyed Iranian centrifuges at Natanz amid an earlier period of Western fears about Tehran's program.

Natanz suffered a mysterious explosion at its advanced centrifuge assembly plant in July that authorities later described as sabotage. Iran now is rebuilding that facility deep inside a nearby mountain. Iran also blamed Israel for the November killing of a scientist who began the country's military nuclear program decades earlier.

Multiple Israeli media outlets reported Sunday that an Israeli cyberattack caused the blackout in Natanz. Public broadcaster Kan said the Mossad was behind the attack. Chan-

nel 12 TV cited "experts" as estimating the attack shut down entire sections of the facility.

While the reports offered no sourcing for their information, Israeli media maintains a close relationship with the country's military and intelligence agencies.

"It's hard for me to believe it's a coincidence," Yoel Guzansky, a senior fellow at Tel Aviv's Institute for National Security Studies, said of Sunday's blackout. "If it's not a coincidence, and that's a big if, someone is trying to send a message that 'we can limit Iran's advance and we have red lines.'"

It also sends a message that Iran's most sensitive nuclear site is "penetrable," he added.

Israel typically doesn't discuss operations carried out by its Mossad intelligence agency or specialized military units.

In recent weeks, Netanyahu repeatedly has described Iran as the major threat to his country as he struggles to hold onto power after multiple elections and while facing corruption charges.

Speaking at the event Sunday night, Netanyahu urged his security chiefs to "continue in this direction, and to continue to keep

the sword of David in your hands," using an expression referring to Jewish strength. Meeting with Austin on Sunday, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz said Israel viewed America as an ally against all threats, including Iran.

"The Tehran of today poses a strategic threat to international security, to the entire Middle East and to the state of Israel," Gantz said. "And we will work closely with our American allies to ensure that any new agreement with Iran will secure the vital interests of the world, of the United States, prevent a dangerous arms race in our region, and protect the state of Israel."

The Israeli army's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, also appeared to reference Iran.

The Israeli military's "operations in the Middle East are not hidden from the eyes of the enemy," Kochavi said. "They are watching us, seeing (our) abilities and weighing their steps with caution."

On Saturday, Iran announced it had launched a chain of 164 IR-6 centrifuges at the plant. Officials also began testing the IR-9 centrifuge, which they say will enrich uranium 50 times faster than Iran's first-generation centrifuges, the IR-1. The nuclear deal limited Iran to using only IR-1s for enrichment.

Since then-President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, Tehran has abandoned all the limits of its uranium stockpile. It now enriches up to 20% purity, a technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%. Iran maintains its atomic program is for peaceful purposes.

On Tuesday, an Iranian cargo ship said to serve as a floating base for Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard forces off the coast of Yemen was struck by an explosion, likely from a limpet mine. Iran has blamed Israel for the blast. That attack escalated a long-running shadow war in Middle East waterways targeting shipping in the region. □



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Ecuador, Peru head to polls under strict virus measures

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Ecuador and Peru were choosing new presidents Sunday under strict public health measures prompted by the coronavirus pandemic, which has recently strengthened in the neighboring South American nations.

Ecuadorians face a runoff between a conservative businessman and a protégé of former leftist President Rafael Correa, while Peruvians have 18 options to pick from in the first round. All seats in Peru's congress, too, are being contested. The elections come amid a surge in COVID-19 cases in both countries and meager progress in their vaccination programs. Lockdowns have returned, threatening further damage to the nations' already battered economies.

In Ecuador, voters have been ordered to wear a

mask, bring their own hand sanitizer and pencil, keep a 5-foot (1.5-meter) distance from others and avoid all personal contact in the polling place. The only time voters will be allowed to lower their mask will be during the identification process.

Election officials in Peru have scheduled specific times for people to vote to avoid overcrowding at the polls. People will have to wipe their shoes on sanitizing mats, wear masks, undergo a temperature check and carry their own blue-ink pen. Poll workers will be paid for the first time. Ecuador's runoff features leftist candidate Andres Arauz, who led the first round of voting with more than 30% on Feb. 7, and former banker Guillermo Lasso, who edged into the final by finishing about half of a percentage point



Voters wearing masks to curb the spread of the new coronavirus have their temperature measured at the entrance of a polling station during general elections in Ollantaytambo, Peru, Sunday, April 11, 2021.

Associated Press

above environmentalist and Indigenous candidate Yaku Pérez.

Arauz is backed by Correa, a major force in the troubled Andean nation despite a corruption conviction. He has proposed making the wealthy pay more

taxes, backing away from agreements with the International Monetary Fund, and finding legal mechanisms to force the repatriation of deposits that Ecuadorians have abroad.

"We Ecuadorians want there to be a unity govern-

ment that respects everyone and not just the few," Arauz said after voting in Quito.

Lasso finished second in the last two presidential contests. He favors free-market policies and Ecuador's rapprochement with international organizations. He has proposed raising the minimum wage to \$500, finding ways to include more youth and women in the labor market and eliminating tariffs for agricultural equipment. "We all wish for an Ecuador of opportunities, free and democratic, where all families can become prosperous," Lasso said after voting.

The country is deep in a recession that many fear will worsen as lockdowns return because of a spike in COVID-19 cases. Ecuador has tallied more than 341,000 cases and over 17,000 deaths as of Friday. □

More volcanic eruptions on Caribbean island of St. Vincent

By KRISTIN DEANE

Associated Press

KINGSTOWN, St. Vincent (AP) — Conditions worsened on Sunday at a volcano on the eastern Caribbean island of St. Vincent

as loud rumbling, lightning and heavy ashfall were observed and residents reported power cuts.

The eruption Friday of La Soufrière forced many residents to evacuate their homes, though some remained in place. The rumbling was heard in the capital of Kingstown, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) south. "I'm just here wondering when it's going to calm down," resident Kalique Sutherland said.

The eruption could continue for some time, said Prof. Richard Robertson, the lead scientist at the Univer-

sity of the West Indies Seismic Research Center.

"It's likely that at some point it would quiet down and hopefully we would have a break so that we could recover a little bit more, but don't be surprised if after the break it picks up like this again," Robertson said.

Elford Lewis, a 56-year-old farmer who evacuated his home on Sunday morning, said the ongoing eruption is worse than the last big one in 1979.

"This one is more serious," said Lewis, who witnessed the big eruption decades ago.

An eruption of the 4,003-foot (1,220-meter) volcano in 1902 killed roughly 1,600 people.

About 16,000 people have had to flee their ash-covered communities with as

many belongings as they could stuff into suitcases and backpacks. However, there have been no reports of anyone being killed or injured by the initial blast or those that followed.

Ralph Gonsalves, the prime minister of the 32 islands that make up the country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, has said people should remain calm and keep trying to protect themselves from the coronavirus. He said officials were trying to figure out the best way to collect and dispose of the ash, which covered an airport runway near Kingstown, and fell as far away as Barbados, about 120 miles (190 kilometers) to the east.

About 3,200 people took refuge at 78 government-run shelters, and four emp-



A woman and a girl walk wearing protective head coverings walk on a street covered with volcanic ash a day after the La Soufriere volcano erupted, in Kingstown, on the eastern Caribbean island of St. Vincent, Saturday, April 10, 2021.

Associated Press

ty cruise ships stood ready to take other evacuees to nearby islands, with a group of more than 130 already taken to St. Lucia. Those staying at the shelters were tested for COVID-19,

with anyone testing positive being taken to an isolation center.

Nearby nations, including Antigua and Grenada, also offered to take in evacuees. □

MedCare's Fit2Fly COVID-19 Testing Centers: Antigen & PCR-testing in the high-rise area; by walk-in and appointment. At your convenience!

PALM BEACH — MedCare's Fit2Fly COVID-19 Testing Center is your best option for the post vacation COVID-19 test which is now required by the U.S. before returning home. All passengers coming to the United States, including U.S. citizens, are required to have a negative (antigen or PCR) COVID-19 test result maximum three days prior to boarding the flight, or documentation of recovery from COVID-19. MedCare's testing centers in and close to the hotels provide you with an easy and secure solution. At this moment we are the only lab that offers the more convenient and cheaper Antigen Test!

MedCare Clinic, a high-quality medical clinic that is specialized in care for tourists and that has been appointed as the national COVID-19 clinic for tourists, and Laboratorio di Servizio, a full-service modern medical laboratory with state-of-the-art equipment, have partnered up to provide fast and reliable COVID-19 testing to all. Laboratorio di Servizio is ISO-15189:2012 accredited by the Dutch Council for Accreditation (M317). Just steps away from you

The general Fit2Fly COVID-19 Testing Centers are located at the Cove Mall and at the Mill Resort, two locations at a stone's throw from your resort, condominium, or other vacation accommodation. Contact them to make an appointment, or just walk-in when it is convenient to you. It is recommended that the tests are done timely, as the negative test is only accepted if taken up to three days before boarding your flight. MedCare Fit2Fly Testing Center at the Cove Mall is opposite the Holiday Inn and is open every day for walk-ins from 8am through 10pm. MedCare's other location is situated at The Mill Resort, across the street from the RIU Hotel and is open every day from 8:30am until 12:30pm. Naturally, if you wish to arrange an appointment for your tests before coming to Aruba this is also possible by contacting us.



At your hotel

For a selection of hotels/resorts in Aruba, MedCare has setup Testing Centers on site. The hotels/resorts at which we have a testing site are: Divi All Inclusive, Divi Dutch Village, Divi Golf, Divi Phoenix, Divi Tamarijn, Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort, Hyatt Regency, Renaissance, and the Ritz-Carlton Resort. Please contact your front desk for more information on our Testing Centers at these properties.



Costs and timing

Passengers must be tested with a viral test that could be either an Antigen Test or a nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT), such as the reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (PCR). The costs for the Antigen Test are only \$50, and the PCR Test is available as well, for a higher charge of \$125. At this moment, only MedCare offers the easier and substantially cheaper Antigen Test that is acceptable for travel to the U.S. as per the CDC guidelines. Pre-travel testing is not covered by the Aruban visitor insurance. Please contact your insurance company to verify if testing costs are insured. Results are e-mailed to you within 24 hours of testing.

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We also offer testing at your house/hotel room for a one-time extra fee of \$120. This fee covers testing up to 10 people (one appointment, at one location and a specific time). Additional persons will be charged \$10 per person. ☐

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Ike's Bistro unveils vegan smorgasbord

EAGLE BEACH — Ike's Bistro at Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa surprises with an excellent, tasteful and varied vegan menu. Executive Chef Sandro Herold is obviously enthusiastic about the new offerings that fill up the place already. "People nowadays are a bit more conscious about what they eat. This menu offers a wide variety with creative vegan food items." We asked some of the guests about their experience: "delicious", "very tasty" "great food, great setting". Even teens, in general not too fond of health food, applauded the offerings. "We did not even miss the meat". Of course the restaurant also offers their extensive regular menu for the non-vegan guests containing all you wish From the Land or From the Sea.

Vegan is hot now, says the chef, and we had that confirmed by several guests. Ike's Bistro is an open air restaurant, located in the Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa. Under a huge cabana with a view to the romantically lit pool of the resort you are seated in relaxed chairs and served by great waiters. And not unimportant: Covid-19 safe.

Your senses are tickled because of the purity and freshness of the food items. You may choose for the unknown which is a three-course



vegan chef tasting menu that can also be combined with a wine pairing. Or you select your choices from the menu. All dishes are 100% Vegan and are gluten-free unless labeled otherwise. Start with appetizers like Vegan Fish Taco, Chick-



peas Tartare and Avocado, Spicy Buffalo Cauliflower Wings or Vegetable Tempura. Tomato Basil Soup or Lemongrass Carrot Ginger Soup are simply delicious as are the Arugula Jackfruit Salad or Mesclun Salad. For the main course pick

your pick: Sesame Ginger Duck (contains gluten), Stuffed Corn Chips and Avocado, Grilled Fish Filet and Roasted Cauliflower or Truffle Porcini Risotto & Grilled Tofu. This heavenly healthy trip reaches its end destination with a scrumptious dessert: Caribbean Snickers, a must-try! All of those choices embrace your inner senses with their freshness and clear flavors.

Vegan might be on the menu in many restaurants nowadays as 'the other option', but here at Ike's Bistro they celebrate vegan and you get hooked, that is a promise. Passion, creativity, purity, dedication to a concept and a beautiful setting take care of an enchanting experience. Vegans and non-vegans are welcome, Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa has got it all covered. □

Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa – Ike's Bistro

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AHATA: In March Aruba experienced a 40% recovery in hotel occupancy

ORANJESTAD — The Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association has published the latest hotel performance data reporting that in March 2021 Aruba hotels experienced a 36.4% average occupancy rate.

MARCH 2021:

- **Occupancy:** The occupancy rate was 36.4%, which is 12% lower than a year ago and 60% lower than in March 2019. Note that Aruba's borders closed on March 17, 2020.
- **ADR:** The average daily rate (for occupied rooms) decreased by 16% compared to last year, to \$278.23. This year's March ADR was 18% lower than in 2019.

	Occupancy	Recovery vs 2019
April	52%	59%
May	48%	58%
Q2 2021	50%	61%
2021	55%	65%

- **RevPAR:** The revenue per available room dropped by 26% to \$101.35. The RevPAR is 66% lower than in 2019.

TIMESHARE

AHATA's Timeshare properties experienced a 68% occupancy rate in March, and project an average occupancy of 71% for April 2021.

AHATA member hotels: Amsterdam Manor Beach Resort, Barceló Aruba, Boardwalk Boutique Hotel, Brickell Bay Beach Club, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, Courtyard by Marriott, Divi & Tamarijn All-Inclusive, Eagle Aruba Resort, Holiday Inn Resort Aruba, Hyatt Regency Aruba, Hyatt Place Aruba Airport, Manchebo Beach Resort, Marriott Aruba & Stellaris Casino, Paradera Park, Renaissance Aruba Resort, The Ritz-Carlton Aruba, RIU Palace Aruba, RIU Palace Antillas, Talk of the Town Hotel.

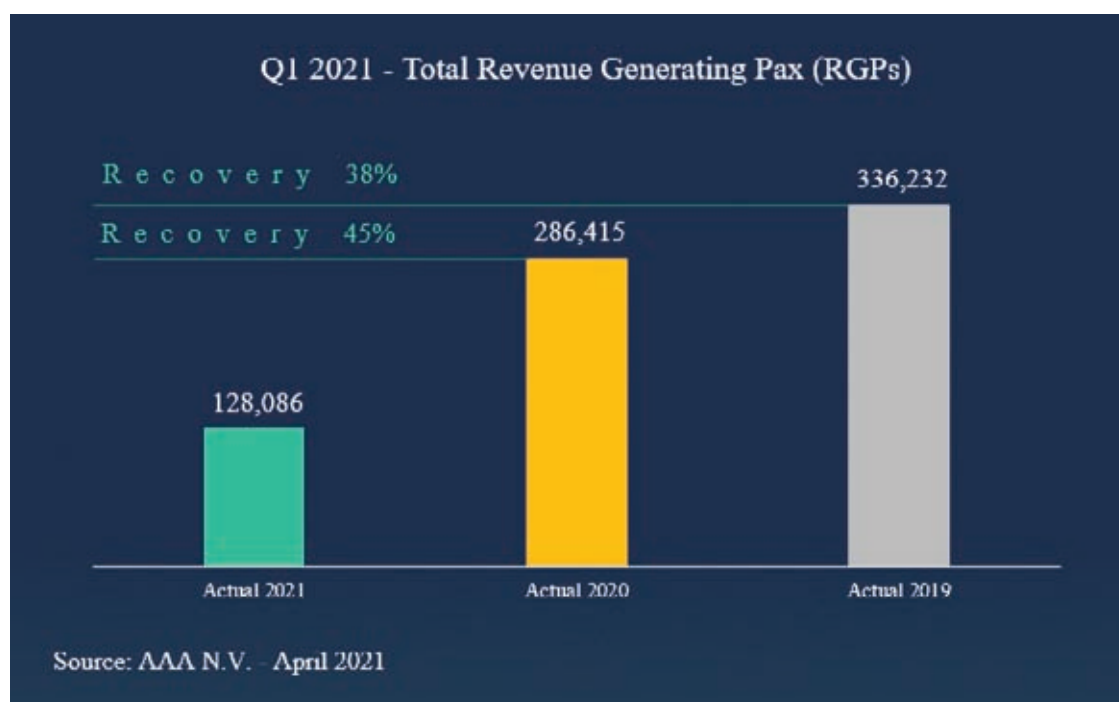
AHATA member timeshares: Divi Aruba Phoenix, Divi Dutch Village, Divi Village Golf, La Cabana, Marriott Ocean Club, Marriott Surf Club. □

Aruba Airport recovers 38% of 2019 departing passenger amount during 1st quarter of 2021

41% More passengers departed in March 2021 versus the previous month of February

ORANJESTAD – With the amounts of departing passengers now known for March 2021, AUA Airport can report as follows on its performance for March and the 1st quarter of 2021.

In March of 2021, the airport handled a total of 47,664 departing passengers which is 41% compared to February 2021. As a result, during the first quarter of 2021 AUA Airport handled a total of 128,086 departing passengers (Revenue Generating Passengers) which is a recovery of 38% of the departures handled in the first quarter of 2019 and 45% of the departures handled in 2020. In the months of January through March 2021 103,758 passengers (pax) travelled to the US, 901 pax to Canada, 10,378 pax to Europe, 4,457 pax to the Netherlands Antilles, and 8,299 pax to Latin America. The total figures for the 1st quarter of 2021 are 29% less than what was forecasted for this period.



Compared to 1st quarter of 2019 AUA Airport recovered 38% of its departing traffic during the 1st quarter of 2021.

An average outbound passenger load factor (PLF) (number of seats of the total seats on board an aircraft that are occupied when departing from AUA Airport) for the US Market

of 49% (*) was reported during the 1st quarter of 2021, while the average PLF for all markets was at 51% during that same period. When comparing this to 2019 where an average PLF for all markets of 85% was reached, AUA airport's departure traffic has yet to grow further to reach pre-pandemic PLFs. (*Excluding de-densifica-

tion of aircraft)

During the 1st quarter of this year, AUA Airport averaged 21 flights per day, down from 33 daily flights during the same period in 2019. In that same period in 2020 AUA Airport handled an average of 26 daily flights.

Based on the latest available insights AUA Airport now expects to recover 49% of its traffic for the year 2021 when comparing this to the year 2019 by reaching approximately 620K departing pax.

This would mean an increase of 44% versus the

year 2020 when AUA Airport handled a total of 430K departing passengers.

About AUA Airport

AUA Airport is one of the busiest airports in the Caribbean region, with 19 different airlines operating into Aruba contributing in processing over 2.5 million passengers per year and providing air service to 20 destinations worldwide. AUA Airport is operationally solid where over 95% of all visitors are leisure guests: 83% from the United States & Canada, 6% from Latin America, 8% from Europe, and 3% from Dutch Caribbean, year to date, March 2021. AUA Airport attributes this to the island's stable economic and political climate, hospitable and multilingual population, and safe environment. AUA Airport undergoes continuous upgrades to maintain its position as one of the region's most innovative airports.

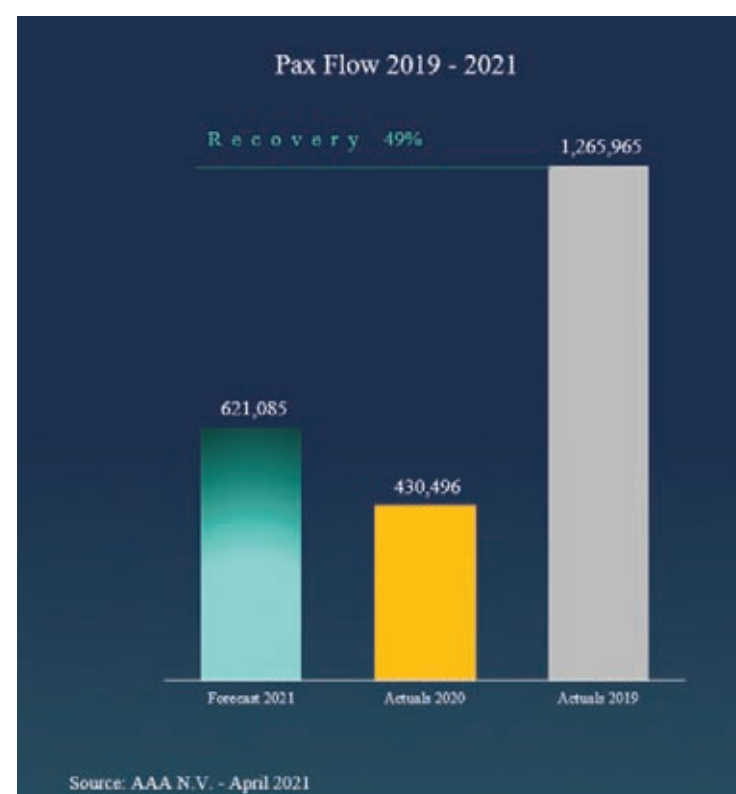
Learn more about what's happening at AUA Airport by visiting www.airport-aruba.com and connect with AUA Airport on Twitter, [com/Aruba_Airport](https://twitter.com/Aruba_Airport), Facebook, facebook.com/ArubaAirport, Instagram, instagram.com/arubaairport/ and LinkedIn, linkedin.com/ArubaAirport. □

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Business faces tricky path navigating post-Trump politics

By **BRIAN SLODYSKO and JOSH BOAK**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For more than a half-century, the voice emerging from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's monolithic, Beaux Arts-styled building near the White House was predictable: It was the embodiment of American business and, more specifically, a shared set of interests with the Republican Party. The party's bond with corporate America, however, is fraying.

Fissures have burst open over the GOP's embrace of conspiracy theories and rejection of mainstream climate science, as well as its dismissal of the 2020 election outcome. The most recent flashpoint was in Georgia, where a new Republican-backed law restricting voting rights drew harsh criticism from Delta Air Lines and Coca Cola, whose headquarters are in the state, and resulted in Major League Baseball pulling the 2021 All-Star Game from Atlanta.

Republicans were furious. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky warned that their actions were "quite stupid," alienating "a lot of Republican fans." GOP strategists argued that they no longer needed corporate America's money to win elections as they try to rebrand as a party of blue-collar workers.

That extends an opportunity to President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats to find an ally in an unlikely place when the party has unified control of the federal government for the first time in a decade. Biden is pushing an ambitious \$2.3 trillion infrastructure package that includes corporate tax increases — which the White House is characterizing to CEOs as upfront investments that will ultimately make companies more profitable.

"It's important for making the country more competitive," said Cedric Richmond, the White House's director of public engagement. "We think the plan is



This Aug. 5, 2020, file photo shows One Times Square, center, in New York's Times Square.

Associated Press

so important to the country that we are advocating and singing its praises to all businesses."

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo estimates she has talked to more than 50 business leaders about the plan, including a round of Easter weekend phone calls. She is encouraging companies to focus on the entire package instead of the tax increases.

"You can't look at one piece of it and say that one number makes you walk away," she said. "They say, 'That's fair. Let me think about it.' That's how they run their businesses."

Whether the corporate split with the GOP widens could help answer questions about the political direction of the country and the extent to which business can continue to influence Washington.

"Nobody in the business community wants hostile communities, angry finger-pointing workforces and turbulent shareholder bases," said Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld, a senior associate dean at the Yale School of Management. "It makes your job so much harder to have every constituency group at war within themselves, which has become the hallmark of the GOP."

Corporate America's marriage with Republicans has long been one of convenience, united by a belief

in low taxes and the need to repeal regulations. But the relationship, already strained during Donald Trump's presidency, has come under increasing pressure as companies take cultural stands.

That Republicans and businesses report to increasingly distinct constituencies helps explain the tension.

A solid majority of Republican voters are white (86%) and older than 50 (62%), according to APVotecast, a national survey of the 2020 electorate. Yet figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that workers are more racially diverse and younger than the Republican base.

James Bailey, a management professor at George Washington University, published an analysis last year that suggested people who identified as Democrats cared more about a company's political activity than Republicans do. Of business people, he said the uproar over the Georgia voting law "is a great opportunity for them to get on board with the young socially active consumer and to do so without much cost."

Just as important, Democratic counties have become the primary engines for growth. The counties that backed Biden last year account for 71% of all U.S. economic activity, accord-

ing to the Brookings Institution.

Democrats say business are comfortable partnering with them to address long-standing issues such as infrastructure after a decade of congressional gridlock, even though companies dislike the possibility of footing the bill.

"Responsible corporate leaders want economic growth and predictable, competent policy—that's what Democrats are offering," said Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney of New York, who is running the House Democrats' campaign arm for the 2022 midterm elections. Many Republicans are exasperated by business's efforts to woo consumers through liberal social politics.

"They are never going to satisfy the demands of the left," said Steven Law, a former attorney for the Chamber who now runs Senate Leadership Fund, a big-spending outside group aligned with McConnell. Meantime "they risk alienating their natural allies in the Republican Party."

Still, Republicans have been a major driver of the rift, looking to capitalize on the culture clash to turn out the party base in the next election. Early indicators suggest business could face blowback.

Georgia's Republican-controlled House voted to strip

Delta of a tax break worth tens of millions of dollars annually for its criticism of the new restrictive law, which voting rights groups have excoriated as an attack on democracy. The intended punishment was rendered moot after the GOP Senate failed to take it up before the legislative session adjourned.

Campaign finance disclosures suggest corporate America's money doesn't buy as much influence as it once did.

Roughly a decade ago, donations from company-sponsored political action committees accounted for an important share of the fundraising pie. But it's stagnated as a source of campaign cash, as court rulings enabled wealthy GOP activists to pour money into the political system.

Just 10 GOP megadonors account for half of the giving to major super political action committees controlled by Republican congressional leaders since 2012, collectively pouring \$541 million into the committees, according to an analysis by The Associated Press of donors who gave over \$1,000. The megadonors also contributed twice as much as conventional PACs and other groups that represent a broad swath of corporate interests.

Political spending by the Chamber has also dropped precipitously. After spending \$29 million in 2016, mostly supporting Republicans and attacking Democrats, the group's contributions dropped to \$10.9 million in 2018, according to data from nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. In 2020, the group endorsed 23 Democrats, which Republicans saw as a betrayal.

That's diminished the group's once unassailable standing with GOP congressional leaders.

"There is absolutely no love lost for corporations, especially when they consistently weigh in on things they don't understand," said Josh Holmes, a political adviser to McConnell. □

Steep decline in giant sea turtles seen off U.S. West Coast

MONTEREY, Calif. (AP) — Scientists were documenting stranded sea turtles on California's beaches nearly 40 years ago when they noticed that leatherbacks — massive sea turtles that date to the time of the dinosaurs — were among those washing up on shore. It was strange because the nearest known population of the giants was several thousand miles away in the waters of Central and South America. Their mysterious presence led researchers to a startling discovery. A subset of leatherbacks that hatches on beaches in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands were migrating 7,000 miles across the Pacific Ocean to the cold waters off the U.S. West Coast, where they gorged on jellyfish before swimming back. The epic journey stunned scientists.

"There are birds that go farther, but they fly. There's a whale shark that might swim a little further, but it doesn't have to come up for air. This animal is actually pushing water all the way across the Pacific Ocean," said Scott Benson, an ecologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's fisheries service in Monterey, who has studied the turtles for decades. "It's just a majestic animal." But now, just as scientists are beginning to fully understand the amazing odyssey, the turtles are disappearing — and fast. In less than 30 years, the number of western Pacific leatherbacks in the foraging population off of California plummeted 80% and a recent study co-authored by Benson shows a 5.6% annual decline — almost identical to the decline documented thousands of miles away on nesting beaches. About 1,400 adult females were counted on western Pacific nesting beaches, down from tens of thousands of turtles a few decades ago, and there are as few as 50 foraging off California, Benson said. If nothing changes, scien-



In this December 2006 photo provided by Karin Forney, is Scott Benson, an ecologist and leatherback turtle expert with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Service, posing with a female western Pacific leatherback turtle on a nesting beach on Santa Isabel Island in the Solomon Islands.

tists say, the leatherbacks — creatures that can weigh half as much as a compact car and have 4-foot-long flippers — could be gone from the U.S. West Coast within three decades, a demise brought on by indiscriminate international fishing, the decimation of nesting grounds and climate change. "The turtles were there and we finally started paying attention," said Jim Harvey, director of San Jose State University's Moss Landing Marine Laboratories at San Jose State University and the study's co-author. "We got into looking at the story just as the story was ending." The study provides critical, but devastating, new population information that doesn't bode well for the leatherbacks, said Daniel Pauly, a fisheries professor at the University of British Columbia and an international expert on reducing commercial fishing's impact on marine ecosystems. "If you find the decline in one place, that might have a number of causes, but if you find the same estimate of decline in two places that indicates something much more serious," said Pauly, who was not involved in the study. "They are really in big trouble." NOAA launched an ag-

gressive initiative to save them in 2015 and will now release an updated action plan this month to inspire greater international cooperation in reducing the number of eggs pillaged on beaches and the number of Pacific leatherbacks entangled in commercial fishing gear. "There is an opportunity right now to stop the decline, but we must seize that opportunity immediately and that will require an international effort by all the nations this animals interacts with," said Benson. "If nothing is done to reverse this course, this population will become, essentially, extinct in the Pacific Ocean." The leatherbacks have likely been foraging off the U.S. West Coast for millennia. There are six other distinct leatherback populations scattered around the world but none of them complete such a long migration. As many as 60% of the leatherback turtles that hatch in the western Pacific Ocean make the trip to California — and scientists aren't sure why some do and others don't. Some go farther north, to waters off Oregon and even Washington state. All the world's leatherbacks are under pressure, but the subset that migrates for months across the vastness

of the Pacific faces unique threats that are particularly difficult for conservationists to counter. Leatherbacks in the eastern Pacific, which nest in Mexico and Costa Rica, are also experiencing a population crash from a sharp reduction in nesting beaches. In the water, commercial fishing boats pursue swordfish in an international no-man's-land, where strict U.S. fishing laws don't apply, and fishing nets and long lines intended for swordfish can injure or kill turtles. They must navigate the fishing grounds of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Japan and other nations to reach the U.S. West Coast. On land, leatherback eggs on nesting beaches in the western Pacific are frequently wiped out by wild animals or humans, who collect the delicacies to eat or sell. Sand-mining operations and development on private beaches are also encroaching on leatherback nests. In the U.S., swordfish fishing with long lines has been banned for 20 years from mid-August to mid-November to protect the giant turtles in a 186,000-square-mile (481,787-square-kilometer) zone off the West Coast. Most recently, California is phasing out the only small drift gill net fish-

ery in the state by 2024, and the long-line swordfish fleet in Hawaii and California must shut down if they accidentally catch more than 16 leatherbacks fleet-wide in a season. Last year, President Donald Trump vetoed a bill co-sponsored by U.S. Sen. Diane Feinstein, a California Democrat, that would have phased out a type of fishing with large mesh underwater nets known to ensnare sea turtles and other species. She reintroduced it in February. These measures have been largely successful in driving down harm to Pacific leatherbacks off the U.S. West Coast and Hawaii. Between 1990 and 2000, 23 leatherback turtles were entangled and killed off the West Coast. Between 2014 and 2018, there were zero, according to NOAA Fisheries. Damien Schiff, an attorney who's sued on behalf of fishermen impacted by the reduction of the swordfish industry, said environmentalists continue to pursue more restrictions on the U.S. fishery when other foreign fisheries are the problem. "Every swordfish that you don't catch in California is going to then be ... supplied by an overseas fishery that doesn't have a good environmental rating," he said. "I don't think you can dispute that fact." Now, with worldwide leatherback numbers plummeting, the pressure is on to replicate these successes outside U.S. waters and spur more cooperation from international fisheries that compete directly with U.S. vessels in far-flung Pacific waters. Some ideas include requiring swordfish imported to the U.S. to be harvested using the same turtle-sparing equipment that's required of American fleets or to expand the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act to include sea creatures that aren't mammals, said Todd Steiner, executive director of Turtle Island Restoration Network, which has pushed for leatherback protections worldwide. □

Associated Press



The logo for Alibaba Group is seen at the company's headquarters in Hangzhou in eastern China's Zhejiang Province, on Dec. 24, 2020.

Associated Press

By **JOE McDONALD**

BEIJING (AP) — Alibaba Group, the world's biggest e-commerce company, was fined 18.3 billion yuan (\$2.8 billion) by Chinese regulators on Saturday for anti-competitive tactics, as the ruling Communist Party

tightens control over fast-growing tech industries. Party leaders worry about the dominance of China's biggest internet companies, which are expanding into finance, health services and other sensitive areas. □

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

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Alibaba fined \$2.8 billion on competition charge in China

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Review: YA sci-fi thriller 'Voyagers' doesn't quite take off

By **LINDSEY BAHR** AP Film Writer

The most surprising thing about "Voyagers," a sci-fi thriller about a group of young adults who have been tasked with travelling to and repopulating a new planet, is that it isn't based on a Young Adult book series. Writer and director Neil Burger, who was also behind the "Divergent" films apparently decided to cut out the Intellectual Property middleman and make his own YA statement. That said, it does borrow heavily from quite a few other sources, with shades of "Lord of the Flies," "The Giver," "Ender's Game," "Euphoria" and any number of space madness films. With a cast including Lily-Rose Depp, Tye Sheridan, Fionn Whitehead, Chante Adams, Archie Madekwe and Quintessa Swindell, nice-looking production design and a fast-moving plot, it's a very watchable film. It also unfortunately suffers from the same problems as some of its IP-brethren—it is dreadfully serious, fails to make the audience care very much about anyone involved and feels like it's the first book in a series when all is said and done. Set in the near future, "Voyagers" dumps vague information about earth's de-



This image released by Lionsgate shows Tye Sheridan, left, and Lily-Rose Depp in a scene from "Voyagers."

Associated Press

teriorating condition and a plan to send a group of people to another planet to start life anew. Since the journey is 86-years-long, it'll be the grandchildren of the initial explorers. So they genetically engineer a group of racially diverse, suspiciously attractive geniuses for this first generation and shoot them off into space as young kids with only Colin Farrell's Richard there to raise and monitor and counsel them. What could possibly go wrong with this terribly hasty plan?

Well, it certainly doesn't help that a few years into the journey Whitehead's Zac and Sheridan's Christopher discover that they're all being drugged to suppress their hormones and keep everyone semi-robotically focused on the mission instead shacking up with their crewmates. When they decide to stop taking the blue drink that it's been hidden in, Zac turns immediately into a feral sex predator with an obsessive focus on Depp's Sela. Soon enough everyone stops

taking "the blue" and after Richard is hurt in an accident and there's no supervision anymore, the ship devolves into a chaotic jumble of raging hormones, power struggles and paranoia and "The Lord of the Flies" parallels really start to take over. There's even a Piggy-like character and a moment where a riled-up faction of the crew starts chanting "Kill!" Oh, the crew also starts to wonder whether there's an alien aboard, as if there wasn't already enough to chew on. "Voy-

agers" has lofty ambitions and big, cliched questions about purpose, but one of the main problems is that it doesn't do a great job of establishing its own characters. Part of that is likely due to "the blue" which makes everyone docile and emotion-free, but even after they stop taking it, the few characters who get personalities are painted with such broad strokes that there's nothing to hold onto. Only Zac gets a real transformation, but there's also no nuance to him. He's a bad guy and a potential rapist with no discernable charisma, and it's totally unclear why any portion of the crew would choose to follow him instead of the level-headed Christopher. Also, while the crew is quite racially diverse, 95% of the film is still laser focused on four white leads. It's the kind of premise that you can imagine would have been better served by a limited series with time to get to know and like at least some of the characters so that there are some stakes. We should be upset by Zac's villainous devolution and torn by who might be the better leader. We should know more than three of the character's names and care when people start dying. □

Chloé Zhao becomes 1st woman of color to win top DGA honor



Chloe Zhao poses for a portrait to promote her film "Nomadland" during the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah on Jan. 22, 2018.

Associated Press

By **LINDSEY BAHR**
Chloé Zhao's "Nomadland" continued its tour of dominance through awards season Saturday night, when Zhao took top honors at the 73rd annual Directors Guild Association Awards. She is the second woman to earn the honor and the first woman of color to do so. Kathryn Bigelow was the first for "The Hurt Locker." And it all but solidifies her frontrunner status leading up to the Oscars on April 25. The untelevised event was held virtually with nominees accepting over zoom calls from around the world, in lieu of the typical hotel ballroom ceremony in Beverly Hills.

Only seven times in history has the DGA winner ever not gone on to take the best director prize at the Academy Awards. Last year was a rare exception when the Guild honored "1917" director Sam Mendes and then the Oscar went to "Parasite" director Bong Joon Ho. Zhao was up against Emerald Fennell for "Promising Young Woman," Aaron Sorkin for "The Trial of the Chicago 7," Lee Isaac Chung for "Minari" and David Fincher for "Mank." The only difference in the Oscars lineup is that Sorkin is not among the nominees — instead, Thomas Vinterberg is for "Another Round." Zhao's lyrical film about

transient workers in the American West starring Frances McDormand started its awards journey winning the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, the People's Choice award at the Toronto International Film Festival, the Golden Globe for best drama and best director and the top honor from the Producer's Guild. □

7	5	9	6	4	3	1	8	2
8	6	4	1	2	5	9	3	7
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1	4	5	3	8	7	6	2	9
6	2	7	8	5	4	3	9	1
5	1	3	2	6	9	4	7	8
4	9	8	7	3	1	2	6	5

Fantasy no more: Blackmore 1st woman to win Grand National

By STEVE DOUGLAS
AP Sports Writer

A Hollywood fantasy turned into reality on Saturday when Rachael Blackmore became the first female jockey to win Britain's grueling Grand National horse race, breaking down one of the biggest gender barriers in sports.

Blackmore, a 31-year-old Irishwoman, rode Minella Times to a landmark victory at odds of 11-1 in the 173rd edition of the famous steeplechase at Aintree in Liverpool, northwest England. "I don't feel male or female right now. I don't even feel human," Blackmore said. "This is just unbelievable." Blackmore is the 20th female jockey to compete in a race that has been a mud-splattered British sporting institution since 1839. Women have only been allowed to enter the National as jockeys since 1975, making it a male-dominated event — until now.

"I never even imagined I'd get a ride in this race, never mind get my hands on the trophy," Blackmore said.

After all, the 1944 Hollywood movie "National Velvet" was the story of a 12-year-old girl, Velvet Brown — played by a young Elizabeth Taylor — who won the Grand National on The Pie, a gelding she won in a raffle and one she decided to train for the world's biggest horse race. In the story, Brown was later disqualified on a technicality, having dismounted before reaching the enclosure.

Even though Aintree was without race-goers because of the pandemic, cheers rang out as Blackmore made her way off the course — still aboard Minella Times — and into the winner's enclosure. She looked as if she couldn't believe what she had done.

Blackmore, the daughter of a dairy farmer and school teacher, grew up on a farm and rode ponies. She didn't have a classic racing upbringing, though, making her ascent

in the sport all the more inspirational. A professional jockey since 2015, she rode the second most winners in Irish jump racing in 2018-19, the same season she won her first races at the prestigious Cheltenham Festival. She was already the face of British and Irish horse racing before arriving at Aintree, having become the first woman to finish as the leading jockey at Cheltenham three weeks ago.

Now she's won the biggest race of them all, one that even non-horse racing enthusiasts turn on to watch and one that first captured Blackmore's imagination. Indeed, her first memory of horse racing is going over to a friend's house and taking part in a sweepstake for the National.

A beaming Blackmore had special words for her parents, who "took me around the country riding ponies when I was younger."

"I can't believe I am Rachael Blackmore. I still feel like that little kid — I just can't believe I am me," she said. "I hope it does help anyone who wants to be a jockey. I never thought this would be possible for me. I didn't dream of making a career as a jockey because I never thought it could happen."

The previous best performance by a female jockey in the National was Katie Walsh's third-place finish on Seabass in 2012. That always looked under threat by Minella Times, who went out as the fourth favorite of the 40 horses in a race run



Rachael Blackmore riding Minella Times wins the Randox Grand National Handicap Chase on the third day of the Grand National Horse Racing meeting at Aintree racecourse, near Liverpool, England, Saturday April 10, 2021. Associated Press

over 4 1/4 miles (6.4 kilometers) and features 30 big

and often brutal fences. Minella Times was always near the front of the field and Blackmore timed the horse's run for glory to perfection, easing past long-time leader Jett with around three fences to jump.

The famous, draining run to the line — about 500 meters from the last fence — was a procession as Minella Times won by 6 1/2 lengths.

"He was just incredible and jumped beautifully," Blackmore said. "I tried to wait as long as I could. When I jumped the last and asked him for a bit, he was there." One of the other two female jockeys in the race, Bryony Frost, was taken to the hospital after being unseated from her horse, Yala Enki. □

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Odor snaps late tie with 1st hit as Yankee, NY tops Rays 8-4

By **FRED GOODALL**
AP Sports Writer

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — Rougned Odor snapped a 10th-inning tie with his first hit as a Yankee, Gio Urshela homered and drove in three runs, and New York rallied Sunday to avoid a weekend sweep with an 8-4 victory over the Tampa Bay Rays.

Urshela hit a two-run homer in the third inning. His fourth hit of the day, a two-out single in the 10th off Collin McHugh (0-1), helped the Yankees put away the AL champions, who were on the verge of completing a three-game sweep before giving up a tying run in the eighth.

Odor was in the lineup for the first time since being acquired in a trade from the Texas Rangers. Cleanly shaven after sporting a scruffy beard for years in Texas, he was 0 for 4 before singling to center on a 3-2 pitch to break a 4-4 tie. Gary Sánchez followed with an RBI single before Urshela finished off the Rays, who allowed the fourth run of the inning to score on an error.

Aroldis Chapman (1-0) pitched a scoreless ninth, and Albert Abreu got the



New York Yankees' Rougned Odor watches his RBI single off Tampa Bay Rays relief pitcher Collin McHugh during the 10th inning of a baseball game Sunday, April 11, 2021, in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Associated Press

final three outs.

Mike Zunino and Randy Arozarena hit two-run homers and rookie right-hander Brent Honeywell Jr. sparked in his major league debut by pitching two scoreless innings as an opener for the Rays, who clung to a 4-3 lead until Gleyber Torres tied it with an eighth-inning single off Ryan Thompson. Zunino and Arozarena both homered off starter Jordan Montgomery, who riled the Tampa Bay bench early in the game by hitting Rays designated hitter Austin Meadows with pitches twice.

Home plate umpire Marty

Foster issued a warning to both benches after Meadows was struck in the back in the first inning. The umpire crew huddled again when a high, inside pitch appeared to glance off Meadows' left forearm, however Montgomery wasn't ejected.

Honeywell, once Tampa Bay's best pitching prospect, had not pitched in a regular season or postseason game since the Triple-A National Championship Game in September 2017. Since then, he's undergone surgical procedures on his right elbow four times, beginning with Tommy John

surgery in February 2018.

The 26-year-old with a backward-breaking screwball breezed through a nine-pitch first inning, then struck out Giancarlo Stanton and Torres before getting Odor to pop to second base to end a 21-pitch outing.

Michael Wacha inherited a 2-0 lead but didn't keep it long. The right-hander yielded a two-run homer to Urshela while allowing the first five batters he faced to reach, and the Yankees went ahead 3-2 when Aaron Hicks grounded into a double play with the bases loaded.

Arozarena's second homer in two days gave the Rays a 4-3 edge that Wacha, who allowed three runs and three hits over four innings, turned over to the bullpen.

The Yankees loaded the bases with one out in the seventh against lefty Cody Reed only to squander the opportunity when Thompson came on and got DJ LeMahieu to ground into an inning-ending double play.

The Rays weren't as fortunate in the eighth when Thompson walked Stanton and Aaron Judge before

giving up the tying single to Torres.

Montgomery allowed four runs and five hits over five-plus innings. He walked two and struck out four.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Yankees: Infielder Luke Voit (left knee surgery) is rehabbing in New York and making progress, manager Aaron Boone said. He's due to see a doctor Monday and not expected to start any baseball activities for another week.

Rays: Outfielder Manuel Margot (groin/quad) returned to the lineup after missing two games and went 1 for 4.

UP NEXT

Yankees: Right-hander Gerrit Cole (1-0, 1.46 ERA) will start the opener of a three-game series against the Toronto Blue Jays in nearby Dunedin, Florida, on an extra day's rest Monday. The Blue Jays are playing home games at their spring training site because of coronavirus pandemic restrictions in Canada.

Rays: Begin a four-game series against the Texas Rangers, with right-hander Tyler Glasnow (0-0, 0.75) facing right-hander Dane Dunning (1-0, 1.80) on Monday. □

Ledecky dominates 1,500 freestyle at California meet

MISSION VIEJO, Calif. (AP) — Katie Ledecky won the 1,500-meter freestyle at the Pro Swim Series meet with the world's fastest time this year.

She touched in 15 minutes, 40.55 seconds in the outdoor pool on Sunday. Ashley Twichell finished second in 16:06.68.

Ledecky's time was 17 seconds quicker than the second-fastest swimmer, Simona Quadarella who swam 15:57.03 at the recent Italian Olympic trials. Ledecky set the world record of 15:20.48 in

2018. Ledecky's 800 split would have won the individual event in Mission Viejo and would have been the world's fastest this year as well. Her final time in the 1,500 would have been good enough to place third in the men's event, won by Jordan Wilimovsky in 15:10.44.

Ledecky finished second in the 100 free in 54.22 seconds. Abbey Weitzeil won in 53.68.

The women's 1,500 will be an Olympic event for the first time at the Tokyo Games. □



Katie Ledecky competes in the women's 1500-meter freestyle final at the TYR Pro Swim Series swim meet Sunday, April 11, 2021, in Mission Viejo, Calif.

Associated Press